



Montana EMS Work Force Retention Issues

FINDINGS

In 2008, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services conducted a survey of a statewide representative sample of licensed Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) to assess factors associated with workforce retention. This report describes factors associated with retention and reasons EMTs are considering leaving the profession in the next five years.

Major findings:

- **What proportion of the EMTs workforce is considering leaving?** 9% of Montana EMTs are considering leaving the profession in the next year, and approximately 25% are considering leaving the profession in the next five years.
- **Which EMTs are most likely to be considering leaving?** EMTs who were older, had longer tenure in the profession, and who were dissatisfied with the profession were more likely to consider leaving.
- **What are the main reasons?** Among EMTs who were considering leaving the profession, the majority indicated that retirement was the primary reason (47%), while fewer indicated that a career change (16%), personal or family issues (16%), organizational issues (13%), work hours (12%), job stress (11%), or pay/benefits (9%)

BACKGROUND

Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) are a critical component of national pre-hospital care system. Maintaining the viability of the EMT workforce is a significant concern for local communities, states, and the Federal government and recruitment and retention of this workforce has been identified as one of the key challenges needing to be addressed.

Potential factors associated with recruitment & retention of EMTs

The lack of competitive pay and benefits

The lack of recruitment programs

The lack of career ladders within the profession

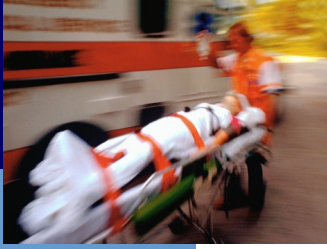
Occupational stress and burn-out

The quality of service management

Lack of accessible education and training

Licensure / certification requirements

Changing levels of volunteerism



METHODS

From January through March 2008 the Montana DPHHS conducted a telephone survey of EMTs to assess workforce retention issues and training needs. A listing of all licensed EMTs (N = 4,460), which include First Responders (21%), Basics and Intermediates (70%), and Paramedics (9%), was obtained through the Business and Occupational Licensing Bureau of the Montana Department of Labor and Industry.

A representative systematic sample of EMTs was selected from the population of licensed EMTs in the state. Trained interviewers conducted the survey using computer assisted telephone interviewing software.

The survey instrument included 74 questions and included questions regarding the respondent's demographic characteristics, the characteristics of the respondent's current position as an EMT, questions regarding the last certification training and refresher course, and recent EMT continuing education and training.

Respondents were asked "How likely is it that you would choose to leave the EMS profession in the next 12 months?" The response categories included:

- definitely would leave
- probably would leave
- probably would not leave
- definitely would not leave

Respondents who indicated that they would not be likely to leave the EMS profession in the next 12 months were then asked "How likely is it that you would choose to leave the EMS profession in the next five years?" The same response categories described above were used for this question.

Respondents could indicate more than one reason for considering leaving the profession. The responses to this question were grouped into the following categories:

- * **retirement**
- * **career** (*career change, lack of challenges on the job*),
- * **organizational** (*dissatisfaction with management, job training requirements, negative work relationships, organizational changes at work*),
- * **personal/family** (*family issues, health-related conditions, moving to a new location*),
- * **work hours** (*lack of flexible schedule, number of hours worked, time commitments for the job*),
- * **job stress**
- * **pay/benefits**

Respondents were also asked "How satisfied are you with the EMS profession?" The response categories included very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied or dissatisfied, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied. *Ninety-one percent of respondents indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with the EMS profession.*

Approximately 25% of EMS professionals are considering leaving the profession in the next 5 years.

SURVEY RESULTS

53% of EMTs completed the survey (n=1023). The majority of respondents were EMT Basic/Intermediates (65%) or First Responders (26%). Approximately two-thirds of respondents were men, and 60% worked in an urban county. Fire and community/municipal-based services were the most frequently identified agency types (26%), followed by other (19%) and volunteer rescue (17%). Over 40% of respondents reported working as an EMT for ten or more years (Table 1).

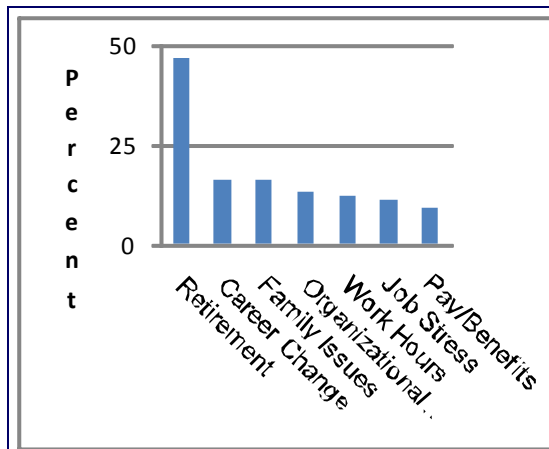
Overall, 9% (n=87) of respondents indicated they were definitely/probably considering leaving the profession in the next year, and 24% (n=245) indicated they were definitely/probably considering leaving the profession in the next five years.

Among respondents indicating they would definitely or probably consider leaving the EMS profession in the next five years, most indicated that retirement was a major reason (47%). Fewer respondents indicated that a career change (16%), personal or family issues (16%), organizational issues (13%), work hours (12%), job stress (11%), or pay/benefits (9%) were a reason for considering leaving the profession (Figure 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of EMT's responding to the survey, MT 2008

EMT Type (Percent may not sum to 100% due to rounding)	(n) %
First responder	(270) 26%
Basic/Intermediate	(667) 65%
Paramedic	(86) 8%
Gender	
Male	(648) 63%
Female	(375) 37%
Age (years)	
18-34	(241) 24%
35-49	(388) 39%
50+	(363) 36%
County of Practice	
Urban	(415) 41%
Frontier	(594) 58%
EMS Agency Type	
Hospital	(114) 11%
Fire	(264) 26%
Community/Municipal	(266) 26%
Volunteer / Rescue	(175) 17%
Other	(190) 19%
Years Working as EMT	
<5	(349) 34%
5 to 9	(219) 21%
≥ 10	(444) 43%

Figure 1: Reasons EMTs are planning to leave the profession in the next 5 years, MT, 2008



Compensated EMTs were significantly more likely to indicate that a career change (25% vs. 6%) and pay and benefits (13% vs. 4%) were a reason they were considering leaving the profession in the next five years compared to non-compensated EMTs.



CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that approximately one in four EMTs in Montana were considering leaving the profession in the next five years. EMTs who were older, had longer tenure in the profession, and who were dissatisfied with the profession were more likely to be considering leaving the profession in the next five years. Among EMTs who were considering leaving the profession, the majority indicated that retirement was the primary reason. EMTs receiving compensation were significantly more likely to indicate that a career change and pay and benefits were a reason they were considering leaving the profession in the next five years compared to non-compensated EMTs. Overall, 91% of EMTs surveyed indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with the EMS profession.

A number of potential strategies are being considered to address the problem of retention in Montana such as providing state income tax breaks and funding for a retirement program for volunteer EMTs and providing funding to support ongoing EMT and service manager training. Strategies are also needed for compensated EMTs to create a career ladder that allow a progression to higher levels of responsibility and compensation within their agencies. Recruiting and retaining younger individuals to the EMS profession is also a challenge that will need to be addressed.

For more information on the data in this report, please contact MT EMS & Trauma Systems, (406) 444-3895 or check out the website at: <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/ems/>



Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Bureau. For more information, contact Jim DeTienne, 406-444-3895, jdetienne@mt.gov